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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the evolution of the Swaziland National Bibliography (SNB), noting its roots in international resolutions on national bibliographies and legislation bestowing legal depository status on the University of Swaziland Libraries and the Swaziland National Library Service. It is observed that since publication of the first issue in 1977, currency, accessibility, coverage, and quality are recurring challenges, while the strain on human resources continues to pose a threat to SNB production. It is argued that in recent times, partnerships within the Swaziland information system and with printers and stakeholders, sustained publication, applied research, responsive administrative systems and routines, dedicated funding, another technical and human interventions have gradually produced modest improvements. It is further noted that there is still room for the SNB to improve itself. The paper concludes that the key to excellence lies in: comprehensive and programmed implementation of international recommendations, intensification of interest in gray literature in all its formats; continuous development of the SNB into a refined World Wide Web portal to Swaziland's published heritage; and a complimentary Swaziland thesaurus sensitive to the content of Swazi culture, traditions, and lexicon. (Author/MES)

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Abstract:

The presentation explores the evolution of the SNB, noting its roots in (i) international resolutions on national bibliographies, and (ii) legislation bestowing legal depository status on the University of Swaziland Libraries (UNISWA) and the Swaziland National Library Service (SNLS). It is observed that since publication of the first issue in 1977, currency, accessibility, coverage and quality are recurring challenges while the strain on the thinly spread human resources continues to pose a threat to SNB production.

It is argued that in recent times, partnerships within the Swaziland information system and with printers and stakeholders, sustained publicity, applied research, responsive administrative systems and routines, dedicated funding, and other technical and human interventions have gradually produced modest improvements. It is further noted that there is still room for the SNB to improve itself. The presentation concludes that the key to excellence lies in, inter alia, comprehensive and programmed implementation of international recommendations; intensification of interest in grey literature in all its formats; continuous development of the SNB into a refined Web portal to Swaziland's published heritage; and, a complementary Swaziland thesaurus sensitive to the content of Swazi culture, traditions and lexicon.

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Background

The precursors of the current Swaziland National Bibliography (SNB) include the compilations by

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Wallace[1], Webster and Mohome[2], Arnheim[3] and Nkabinde[4]. It was only in 1977 that the first issue of the title *Swaziland National Bibliography*[5] was published by the University of Swaziland Libraries (UNISWA). The stated objective ever since is to issue the SNB annually. Five factors account for the evolution of the SNB from the early and humble beginnings of the late 1960s to its present state, namely:

- The professional and cultural convictions, coupled with the sterling efforts of interested pioneer library and information experts, to trace, make available for consultation and preserve a standard record of the published heritage of Swaziland, partly gave impetus to the official launch in 1977.

- The resolutions of the International Congress on National Bibliographies, Paris, 1977, subsequently reinforced at regional level by the Gauteng Declaration of the Seminar on Accessing Information Resources in Southern Africa: National and Subregional Bibliographic Control, Johannesburg, 1996[6], and further affirmed by the International Conference on National Bibliographic Services, Copenhagen, 1998, collectively provide the backdrop for the initiatives surrounding the production and continuing evolutionary development of the SNB.

- The Books and Newspapers Act, no. 20 of 1963, the Archives Act, no. 5 of 1971 and the King's-Order-in-Council, no. 3 of 1978 bestowed legal depository status on the Registrar - General's office (up to 1978), the Swaziland National Archives (SNA), and the Swaziland National Library Service (SNLS) and UNISWA, respectively. With the 1978 order and designation of UNISWA as ISBN Agency, and despite lack of clarity regarding SNB production responsibility and other omissions, these statutes provide the legal framework making it possible to acquire and establish bibliographic control over Swaziland's published heritage. As ISBN Agency, UNISWA has the advantage of having an idea of what is formally being published and then tracking it on behalf of the national depository programme as a whole.

- A sense of dissatisfaction with an unenviable record of failure to issue the SNB in a timely manner, especially the editions for1978-1982, 1983-1985, 1986-1987 and 1988-1993 which were delayed by five years, one year, two years, and six years respectively, elicited responses for a production turn around.

- The interest expressed by subscribers, as shown by a considerable and persistent number of claims for delayed issues that inundated UNISWA, precipitated decisions cumulatively giving the SNB a new lease of life.

Initiatives and lessons

Swaziland does not have an official National Bibliographic Agency (NBA). With the publication of the first issue in 1977, UNISWA assumed and continues to play the role of a quasi - NBA. Among other things, the absence of clear NBA structures accounts for the currency, access, coverage and quality problems that have characterised the SNB. Nonetheless, a modicum of progress in addressing these issues has been realised over the years, though there is still considerable room for improvements. The improvements to date are attributable to the following:

Partnerships

Following earlier cooperative efforts among UNISWA staff, a joint committee (JC) of UNISWA and SNLS was formed in 1993. The JC produced the 1988-1993 issue which, surprisingly, experienced the worst release delay of six years. The difficulties of the JC included:

(a) High staff turnover and lack of continuity in the cooperating institutions.

(b) Apparent entanglement of the SNB with the Swaziland Union Catalogue initiative.

(c) Inadequate cataloguing and classification skills among participants created enormous editing work.

(d) Uneven spread of information technology (IT) (i.e., CDS/ISIS) skills.

The delay in the issuing of the 1988-1993 SNB issue suggests that cooperation, as a possible solution to national bibliographic control problems, may perhaps only be situational. In Swaziland's experience, cooperation should start with standards adoption and technical capacity building. It is with regard to the later that under the auspices of the Swaziland Library Association (SWALA) and in cooperation with UNISWA and SNLS, major cataloguing and classification workshops were run in 1995, 2000 and 2001. Simultaneously, broader partnerships outside the confines of institutions responsible for national bibliographic control are important. As part of the redefinition of cooperation, UNISWA is currently seeking to closely network with grey literature, electronic and audiovisual media producers to help attain comprehensive coverage in the SNB.

When the 1988-1993 SNB was released, quality was, in the interim, sacrificed in favour of currency, access and coverage. It was imperative to redefine production line responsibility to give enough time to build sufficient technical capacity within the Swaziland national bibliographic control system.

Streamlining

The lessons from the JC initiative provided the *raison d' tre* for the streamlining and redefinition of the nature of cooperation and collaboration, with production responsibility reverting to UNISWA. The key elements characterizing the rearrangement are:

(a) Continued cooperation in sharing of information about publications.

(b) At UNISWA, SNB production is a key result area included in the strategic plan 1999/2000 - 2004/2005, and therefore attracts an annual budget allocation. Among other things, the objective of UNISWA as defined in the plan is "*to* consolidate and maintain the national bibliographic control programme through *regular compilation and publication of bibliographies and indexes in order to attain comprehensiveness, currency and accuracy in the recording, preservation and promotion of the national history.*" [7]

(c) Publicity - All ISBN allocation correspondence conclude by underscoring the need to pay homage (by depositing publications to which ISBNs are assigned) to Swaziland's published heritage. This helps to keep the SNB "fire burning".

(d) Broadening partnerships - After a few trials, UNISWA has identified, for the time being, a reliable printer with ability to deliver incremental quality on time.

Research

To effectively deal with issues affecting the production of the SNB, it was apparent that an informed

knowledge base was required. It is in this light that the article "Swaziland National Bibliography: the currency predicament", *International Cataloguing and Bibliographic Control*, 27 (1), 1998[8], was written. How did this study help in improving the SNB? Besides clarifying the nature of the problems that have historically retarded progress, it helped crystallize ideas on coverage. Because societies in developing nations like Swaziland have their strong cultures still deeply embedded in oral traditions, because the formal publishing sector is small and fragile, and unless a bold decision is taken to stretch the definition of ***published heritage***, the contents of the SNB would not be reflective of the totality of the country's historic, cultural, intellectual, social, economic, and political experiences. Thus, to attain comprehensive coverage, the SNB includes bibliographic records of undergraduate and graduate dissertations and theses, serials, articles and monographs, and grey literature in all its various formats, published in or outside Swaziland. Related studies are available and collectively, this research knowledge has significantly guided the technical and human interventions shaping the currency, access, coverage and quality thrust of the SNB.

Technical interventions

Consistent with the ideals of Universal Bibliographic Control (UBC), the cataloguing, classification and indexing of the SNB is, as much as possible, in accordance with international standards. Following a myriad of technical problems in the production of the 1988 - 1993 issue, focus is on:

- Continuous improvement in the application of Anglo-American Cataloguing Rules (AACR2) and Dewey Decimal Classification (DDC). Starting with the 1999 issue, Library of Congress Subject Headings (LCSH) are assigned to all entries. These applications have considerably aided description, arrangement and usability as well as broadening access points to the SNB.

- The use of CDS/ISIS up to 1998 after which UNISWA migrated to the UCS Library system (formerly URICA), word processing software and a Hewlett Packard laser jet printer. These IT applications came as a boon to data capture, editing, indexing, design and layout, and print quality, producing significant improvements in production turn around times, and therefore the present currency levels. During the course of the year, SNB records are downloaded from the UNISWA online public access catalog (OPAC) on an ongoing basis and converted, presently to Corel WordPerfect 8, for fine tuning to comply with SNB record formats. A camera ready laser jet printed compilation is produced for further refinement by professional printers.

In the difficult conditions under which the SNB is produced, the key information elements pertinent to item identification that are provided are author, title, subject headings, imprint, physical description and ISBN. With respect to grey literature which is not formally published and yet constitutes a significant proportion of content, SNB imposes imprint information, where feasible, to assist in the tracing of materials.

However, the immensely significant customs, cultural institutions and systems like umhlanga, incwala, lutsango and tinkundla, etc. which are unique to Swaziland's heritage and for which users have demonstrated an interest are, understandably, not specifically covered in LCSH terminology. Under LCSH controls, these subjects are accommodated under such general terms as *Manners and customs, Rites and ceremonies, Social life and customs, Festivals, Social institutions,* etc. To the extent that SNB subject indexing is not always specifically sensitive to the content of Swazi culture, traditions and lexicon, it can be argued that user needs are not optimally addressed. It is imperative to explore SiSwati subject terms for incorporation into schemes enjoying international usage.

Other weaknesses relate to the provision of general information in the use of the SNB publication. A few inquiries for materials cited in the SNB are erroneously directed to UNISWA, the SNB publisher, rather

than the publishers of such materials. In the SNB print environment, a clear "how to" user guide is required. In the event of migrating to the electronic environment, the same guide, with some modifications, would apply. Either way, users require guidance in the interpretation and use of the following key items: (a) arrangement; (b) access points (author, title, series, subject headings, and indexes), imprint information especially for grey literature and what to do with it, etc. and (c) a comment on General Material Designation to accommodate the expanding nature of published heritage formats.

The projected enhancements will go a long way towards helping the SNB satisfy the broad range of needs that have emerged to date, namely:

- Inventorying of Swaziland's published heritage.
- Serving as a research tool for researchers, scholars, students, officials, etc.
- Providing an invaluable acquisitions tool for national, regional and international information service providers and consumers.

The Human factor

Improvements in the management of human relations have contributed to some of the few achievements in the SNB production and distribution processes. This has meant the involvement of everybody including the secretaries, paraprofessionals and professionals. The idea is to instill pride and a sense of ownership enough to motivate the pursuit of higher levels of achievement. Measures taken in this regard include:

- Creating space for secretaries to participate in data capture routines, initial indexing and formatting, ongoing updates of publisher lists, etc.
- Enabling paraprofessionals to pay visits to publishers to identify and acquire materials in terms of legislation.
- Networking with researchers, publishers and librarians to promote submission of publications and bibliographic records.
- Acknowledging staff contribution not only by word of mouth, but by immortalizing it by printing it in the SNB issues.
- Prompt response to inquiries, timely update and review of exchange and subscription lists, and expeditious preparation of cover letters and invoices to ensure distribution of SNB issues within at least a one week time frame from the date of receipt from the printers.

Challenges and Opportunities

The major challenges facing the SNB are:

- In the absence of a NBA, the ideals of currency, accessibility, coverage and quality are under threat from the strain on the thinly spread human resources.
- With some exchange partners and subscribers un-subscribing, a few are coming on board.

- Lack of clarity on measures to take in cases of non-compliance with deposit legislation; inadequate definition of the materials falling within the domain of published heritage; and presently, there are no legal provisions enabling the establishment of a NBA. In this regard, effective legislation for Swaziland should be a result of broad consultations among key information players, including the SNLS, UNISWA, SNA and others. In addition, the provisions of such legislation should be guided by trends in library and information services so that it can withstand the test of time. The later will assist in circumventing the need for and minimize any future amendments that may have to be piloted through the Ministry of Education, Cabinet, House of Senate and House of Assembly before Royal Assent.

By and large, the future perhaps lies in comprehensive implementation of the recommendations of the International Conference on National Bibliographic Services, Copenhagen, 1998. Meantime, the SNLS bill that has passed through Cabinet, should, if enacted, provide the foundation for a NBA to systematically address all matters of national bibliographic control and further articulation and production of a robust legal depository instrument. Basically, the bill proposes to consolidate and extend legal deposit status to SNLS, SNA and UNISWA. At regional level, the Southern African Bibliographic Control Committee (SABCC) as enshrined in the Gauteng Declaration of 1996, for which Swaziland is a member, has potential to serve as an important mentor for national and regional bibliographic control services in Southern Africa. Indeed, the 1996 Johannesburg seminar showed wide discrepancies in the levels of national bibliographic development and linguistic diversity among the 14 nations of the Southern African Development Community (SADC). However, the prospects for integrated regional bibliographic control services are real, provided a representative number of member bibliographies are produced, developed in conformity with international standards and superficial barriers bridged.

Assessment

SNB's achievements, so far, can only be modest, the highlights of which include:

- Previous issues up to 1987 comprised the main bibliography, numerous appendices capturing foreign books, dissertations and theses, articles and conference papers, legislation, law reports, research in progress and future publications, list of publishers and author/title index. The 1986-87 issue is annotated. From the 1988-93 issue, the format was simplified to include only the main bibliography capturing both local and foreign materials of all types relating to Swaziland, list of publishers, author/title index, and starting with the 1999 issue, subject index. This simplification collocates subject entries and eases usage of the SNB.

- With some sacrifices in other operational areas of library service, SNB has attained its stated currency objective, and a modicum of quality. Users, exchange partners and subscribers in SADC, Europe and USA have the benefit of current information on what is available on Swaziland.

- It costs an average of E1 170,00 to produce an average of 53 copies of the SNB and an average of only 13 subscriptions bring in approximately E1 209,00 per annum. Without getting into the implications of the continuing depreciation of the Lilangeni and the approximately six exchange agreements, it is arguable that the SNB is generally self sustaining.

- Current SNB entries are accessible on the general UNISWA Web OPAC at http://library.uniswa.sz. The consolidation of these entries to provide timely and easy access to a stand alone online SNB is under exploration.

Outlook

The foregoing suggests that there is still room for the SNB to excel in terms of currency, access, coverage and quality. To this end, the strategic thrust centres on:

- Cross-cutting implementation of the recommendations of the International Conference on National Bibliographic Services, Copenhagen, 1998 and the resolutions of the Seminar on Accessing Information Resources in Southern Africa ... Johannesburg, 1996.

- Development and consolidation of structures to control grey literature, both print and electronic, including accessing Swaziland's Outside Broadcasting videocassettes on Swaziland royalty, customs, traditions and culture.

- Consolidation of partnerships within the profession, with suppliers and other institutional stakeholders.

- Quality innovations including (a) upgrading of binding and usage of acid free paper to achieve hard copy product durability and (b) skills development in desktop publishing. UNISWA is in the process of identifying partners for the supply of acid free paper and other ancillaries, developing bindery facilities, and continues to explore working institutional links to help build and consolidate desktop publishing capacity.

- Compilation of subject terms unique to Swaziland and integrating them with internationally used thesauri such as LCSH.

- With a population of just under a million, a land area of 17 364 km^2, unlike many African nations, Swaziland has no ethnicity differences which makes name and subject authority controls easy. However, in the event of a regional bibliography and the idea of incorporating Swaziland subject terms into international thesauri taking shape, such authority work becomes even more pressing in view of the linguistic and cultural affinities of SADC societies.

- Production of an electronic version of the SNB for enhanced and broadened access, possibly starting with a CD-ROM edition in collaboration with partners such as the National Inquiry Services Centre (NISC), Grahamstown, South Africa. The projected scenario is that, for the foreseeable future, the print and electronic version may complement each other. The subscribers to the print version and exchange partners may possibly have free access to the electronic edition. Depending on how such developments unfold, it can only be anticipated that a workable compromise option may have to come from any subscription and access formula gaining ground in the electronic serials/journal environment. Ultimately, the consideration would be that the SNB, unlike other high profile national bibliographies, is seemingly and primarily more of a cultural symbol and therefore, financial returns, while sensible in terms of meeting production costs, are perhaps secondary.

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